

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at a Campaign Rally for Governor Jon S. Corzine in Holmdel, New Jersey

July 16, 2009

The President. Hello, New Jersey. Oh, this is a good-looking crowd here. Thank you. It is good to be back in New Jersey. A couple of quick acknowledgments—first of all, I want to acknowledge a few of the elected officials who have just done great work for New Jersey: Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah Healy; Newark Mayor Cory Booker; Governor Codey is in the house. I want to thank the Abundant Life Church Choir for the music.

I also just want to take a moment—I know many of you heard that five officers in Jersey City were shot in the line of duty this morning. I've been in contact with Mayor Healy about this issue, and obviously, all the families are in our thoughts and prayers. It's a reminder of what our law enforcement officials do each and every day to protect us and to protect our families. And we need to keep them in mind as we go forward.

It's a little warm here. I think we're going to have to take off my jackets—[inaudible].

Audience member. We love you.

The President. I love you back.

I want you to know I'm proud to stand with a man who wakes up every day thinking about your future and the future of Jersey, and that's your Governor, Jon Corzine.

Like many of us in public life today, Jon's a leader who's been called to govern in some extraordinary times. He's been tested by the worst recession in half a century, a recession that was caused by years of recklessness and irresponsibility and a do-nothing attitude. It was caused by the same small thinking that has plagued our politics for decades, the kind of thinking that says we can afford to just tinker around with our problems; we can put off the tough decisions, defer the big challenges. We can just tell people what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear.

Well that's not the kind of leader that Jon Corzine is. Jon Corzine didn't run for this office on the promise that change would be easy. He hasn't avoided doing what's hard. This isn't somebody who's here because of some special interest or political machine; this is a man who is here because he cares about what is right in New Jersey and for New Jersey.

Let's take a look at the record. This is a man who has provided more property tax relief than any other Governor in New Jersey history. This is the first Governor in 60 years who has reduced the size of government, not just talked about it. This is a leader who has stood up against those who wanted to cut what really matters, like education. Jon Corzine has not only protected funding for New Jersey's schools, he reformed them with tougher standards. And now students in New Jersey rank at the top of the country in reading and math because of Jon Corzine.

Since Jon Corzine became Governor, the Children's Health Insurance Program has been expanded by 80,000 more kids—80,000 more children have health insurance who didn't have it before. New Jersey's become a leader in clean energy. Jon Corzine wasn't just the first Governor to pass an economic recovery plan for his State; he was an ally with the Obama administration in helping us develop a national recovery plan.

And because of these plans, jobs have been saved and created in the State of New Jersey: jobs of cops and teachers; jobs in small businesses and clean energy companies. Uninsurance—unemployment insurance and health insurance have been extended to those who've felt the brunt of this recession and lost their jobs. Tax relief has been delivered to families and small businesses all across the State. And I can promise you this, that more help is on the way in the weeks and months to come.

Now, I realize this is little comfort to those of you who've lost jobs in this recession or know somebody who has. I realize that there are a lot of folks who are worrying about losing their home, worried about paying the bills, putting food on the table. And I'll be honest with you, even though jobs have always been one of the last things that come back in a recession, some of the jobs that have been lost may not come back.

Because the fact is, even before this crisis hit, we had an economy that was creating a great deal for the folks at the very top, but not a lot of good-paying jobs for the rest of America. We didn't have an economy that was built to compete in the 21st century, one where we—I mean, think about the economy before the recession. We had an economy where we spend more on health care than any other nation on Earth but we aren't any healthier; where we've been slow to invest in the clean energy technologies that will create new jobs and industries right here in America. We had an economy where we watched our graduation rates lag behind the rest of the world. We used to be number one in college graduation rates; now we're in the middle of the pack at a time when knowledge has never been more important for economic success.

We inherited an economy where Washington didn't pay for anything, made a lot of promises, so we ended up inheriting a \$1.3 trillion deficit. Financial regulation, nobody even thought of, and as a consequence, people could take enormous risks and have Main Street end up paying the cost.

But you know what? That was the America of yesterday. We're now looking at the America of tomorrow. We're going forward. That's not the America our children is—are going to inherit. We're going forward, New Jersey, because what we're facing right now is more than just a passing crisis; it is a transformative moment that has led this Nation to an unmistakable crossroads.

There are some in Washington, and probably some in Trenton, who want us to just go down the path we've already traveled for most of the last decade, to do the same old, same old; the path where we just throw up our hands at the challenges we face. You hear those voices now: "Oh, health care is too hard; we can't do health care reform." "Oh, energy, that's too hard; we can't free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil." "Oh, we can't regulate Wall Street; no, that's too hard." The only thing they're offering is more tax breaks to the wealthiest few that make the rich richer and the deficit larger and leave you holding the bag. That's their idea of America.

It's a path where our health care costs keep rising; where our oil dependency keeps on growing; where our financial markets remain an unregulated crapshoot; where our workers lose out on the jobs of tomorrow. Jersey, I want you to know that's not a future that I accept; that's not a future that Jon Corzine accepts; that's not a future that you accept. We are moving in a new direction. That's what we believe in.

We did not come this far as a country because we've looked backwards or stood still in the face of great challenges. We didn't arrive to this place by lowering our sights or diminishing our dreams. We are a forward-looking people; we face the future without fear, but with

determination; not with doubt, but with hope. We've always been willing to take great chances and reach for new horizons and remake the world around us. And that's what we must do again.

I am absolutely confident that we will weather this particular economic storm. But once we clear away the wreckage, the real question is, what will we build in its place? Even as we rescue this economy from the crisis, we've got to rebuild it so that it is better than it was before. We've got to lay a new foundation that will allow the United States of America to thrive and compete in the global economy and give every young person—black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American—a chance at a better life. That means investing in the clean energy jobs of the future. That means educating and training those workers for those jobs. That means finally controlling health care costs that are driving our Nation into debt.

I want to just talk about health care for a minute. I hope you don't mind. I know it's warm, but just fan yourself a little bit. Because the health care debate is starting to heat up, so I just want to talk to you just for a brief moment about this. It's an issue that your Governor has been fighting for here in New Jersey. The reason we have to fight is not just because we're one of the only advanced nations on Earth that leaves millions with no health insurance. It's not just the fact that we spend 50 percent more than any other country, and yet we don't have better outcomes. The fact is that health care affects the financial well-being and security of every single American, even those who have health insurance. It affects the health and well-being and security of every single family. It affects the stability of our entire economy.

Health reform is about every one of you who's ever faced premiums and copayments that are rising faster than your salary or your wages. It's about every one of you who has ever worried that you might lose your health insurance if you lose your job or change your job. It's about anyone who's ever worried that you may not be able to get health insurance or change insurance companies if you or someone that you love has a preexisting medical condition.

Health insurance reform is about the man from Baltimore who sent us his story. Some of you know I read 10 letters from ordinary Americans every day so that I keep in touch. I don't want to go "Washington" too quick on anybody. So this man from Baltimore—he's a middle class college graduate, but when he changed jobs, his health insurance expired. And during that time, he needed emergency surgery, and he woke up \$10,000 in debt, debt that has left him unable to save or buy a home or make a career change. That's who we have to reform health care for.

Reform is about the woman in Colorado who told us that when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, her insurance company—the one that she had paid over \$700 a month for—refused to pay for anything connected to her disease. She felt like she had been given a second death sentence, she said. She had to pay her own treatment with her retirement funds. That woman in Colorado, that's who we're fighting for when we talk about health care reform.

Health care reform is about that small-business owner from right here in Jackson, New Jersey, who told us he employs eight people; he provides health insurance for all of them. But his policies are going up 20 percent every year. It's his highest business expense beside the wages he pays his employees. He's already had to let two of them go. He may be forced to eliminate health insurance altogether. That man and his employees, that's who health care reform is all about.

I've heard these stories in town halls; I've read letters; I've seen them on our web sites more times than I can remember, and so has Jon Corzine. We have talked and talked and

talked about fixing health care for decades. And we have finally reached a point where inaction is no longer an option, where the choice to defer reform is nothing more than a decision to defend the status quo, and I will not defend the status quo. We are going to change health care reform.

I will not stand for a future where health care premiums rise three times faster than people's wages. I will not stand for a future where 14,000 Americans lose their health insurance every day. This Nation cannot afford a future where our Government eventually is going to be spending more on Medicare than—and Medicaid than what we spend on anything else today combined.

That's what 's driving our deficit; that's what's driving our debt. That's what's forcing families into debt; that's what's forcing businesses into debt. The price of doing nothing about health care is a price that every taxpayer and every business and every family will have to pay. That's unacceptable; it is unsustainable, and we are going to change it in 2009.

Now, I got to warn you, though, it's not going to be easy. There's a reason why it hasn't happened for 50 years. Harry Truman wanted to do it; couldn't get it done. Every President since that time has talked about it; hasn't gotten it done. So it's not going to be easy. And you're going to hear the same scare tactics from special interest groups that have been used to kill health care reform for decades. So let me just be clear here, New Jersey, because you're going to hear a lot of nonsense. I know that a lot of Americans are satisfied with their health care right now; they're wondering what they get out of health care reform. So let me be absolutely clear about what reform means for you.

First of all, if you've got health insurance, you like your doctor, you like your plan—you can keep your doctor, you can keep your plan. Nobody is talking about taking that away from you. But here's what reform will mean for you: It will mean lower costs and more choices and coverage you can count on. Health insurance reform will save you and your family money. If you lose your job, you change your job, you start a new business, you'll still be able to get quality health insurance you can afford. You'll have confidence that it's there for you.

Now, if you don't have health insurance, you're finally going to be able to get it at affordable prices. If you have a preexisting medical condition, no insurance company will be able to deny you coverage. You won't be worrying about being priced out of the market. You won't have to worry about one illness leading your family into financial ruin. Americans who have coverage will finally have stability and security, and Americans who don't will finally have quality, affordable options. That's what reform means.

Reform means that for the first time, we'll have a health insurance exchange. It's a fancy word for a simple concept: We're going to create a marketplace where you and your family and small businesses can go to shop for their health insurance and compare, side-by-side, prices and services and quality so that you can choose the plan that best suits your needs. And that's going to mean that insurance companies are going to have to compete for your business. And one of those choices would be a public health insurance option, an affordable plan that would finally keep the insurance companies honest, because they'd be increasing competition and promoting the best practices. So you'd have insurance companies having to look over their shoulder. They can't just price gouge, and they can't just eliminate people who are sicker or older. They'd have to cover everybody.

Most of all, I have promised that reform will not add to our Federal deficit. You're going to hear all kinds of stories about this. It will be paid for. And a big part of how we're going to do

that is by cutting out the waste and unnecessary subsidies we give to insurance companies that drive up costs for everybody.

So let me be clear: When you hear that health care reform will cost \$1 trillion over 10 years, you need to know that at least half of that will be paid for by money already in the system that's being badly spent. We'll all—I mean, we're spending \$177 billion to give to insurance companies instead of making sure that money is going to patients for decent care.

We'll also change incentives so that our doctors and our nurses can finally start providing patients with the best care and not just the most expensive care. And if we do that, then reform will bring down the cost of Medicare and Medicaid, and that will lower our deficits in the long run. So make no mistake about it: Health care reform is deficit reform.

This is what reform would mean for all of us. Right now we are closer to making it a reality than we have ever been. We now have the support of the hospitals; we've got the support of the doctors; we've got the support of the nurses who represent the best of our health care system and know what's broken about it. We have supporters—we have the support of Governors like Jon Corzine who know what reform would mean to the people of this State. We've made unprecedented progress in Congress, especially this week.

But now is when it gets really hard. Now is when we've got to get over the finish line. This is when you start hearing the same criticism, the same scare tactics that have held us back in the past. And if you do hear these critics, I want you to ask them a question I always ask: What's your plan? What's your alternative? What do you plan to do for all those families whose medical bills are driving them into bankruptcy? What will you do for the businesses that are choosing between closing their doors or letting go of their workers or eliminating health care for their employees? What do you have to say to every taxpayer in America whose dollars are propping up a health system that's driving us further and further into debt?

When it comes to health care or energy or education, the cynics, the naysayers, the Washington crowd, they seem to think we can somehow just keep on doing what we're doing and expect a different result. But everywhere I go, I meet Americans who know we can't do that. They know we've got to change how we're doing business. They know change isn't easy. They know that there will be setbacks and false starts. But they also know this: We are at a moment when we've been given the extraordinary opportunity to remake our world, a chance to seize our future, a chance to shape our destiny. As difficult as it sometimes is, there's something about the American spirit that says that we can—we don't have to cling to the past. We're going to look forward to the future. We're creating a movement for change, and that doesn't begin in Washington, that begins here in New Jersey.

The American people have decided it's time to move forward. You've decided it's time for change. You're willing to face the future unafraid. If you do that, if you stand with us, if you talk to your neighbors and your friends and your coworkers, you call your Members of Congress and your Senators, if you reelect Jon Corzine, if you work hard to believe in a future that is good for our children and our grandchildren, there is nothing that's going to stop us, New Jersey.

We're going to get health care reform done; we're going to get energy reform done; we're going to get education reform done; we're going to get financial regulation reform done. We're going to set our sights forward, and we are going to create the kind of America that our children deserve.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:14 p.m. at the PNC Arts Center. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. Richard J. Codey of New Jersey.

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